DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 055 SP 021 500

AUTHOR Ellis, Joseph R.; And Others
TITLE Teaching Role Difficulties Reported by First Year Elementary Teachers in Illinois Public Schools.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Preservice Teacher Education; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Illinois

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the responses of 169 elementary school teachers to a questionnaire collecting three types of data: (1) information pertaining to four unique items prepared specifically for elementary school teachers; (2) data regarding seven teaching roles and related activities for each role; and (3) written comments. The two situations unique to elementary education teaching perceived as being most difficult were the tasks of identifying student readiness for instruction and providing for different learning styles. Role data provided by respondents suggest the greatest concern with tasks related to "teacher as planner" and "teacher as link to the community." The teachers had particular difficulty establishing relevant and clear objectives and using assessment and evaluation techniques. Other role areas included on the questionnaire were "director and helper of learning," "counselor," "mediator," "member of teaching profession," and "member of school community." Recommendations, based on the findings, for improving beginning elementary school teachers' preservice preparation and inservice education involve examination and revision of teacher education curricula, courses that address teacher roles, and local inservice teacher education programs. (JM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED227055

TEACHING ROLE DIFFICULTIES REPORTED BY FIRST YEAR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Joseph R. Ellis
Wesley A. Many
D. Eugene Meyer
Professors of Education
Northern Illinois University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joseph R. Ellis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

SP 021 500

TEACHING ROLE DIFFICULTIES REPORTED BY FIRST YEAR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Joseph R. Ellis
Wesley A. Many
D. Eugene Meyer
Professors of Education
Northern Illinois University

The performance of teachers is perhaps the most important variable in facilitating school-based learning and, thereby, a determinant of the success of school programs. The evolution of the specific concern for the professional difficulties of teachers is documented by Eddins (1930) "Why Teachers Fail;" Spears (1945) "What Disturbs the Beginning Teacher;" Wey (1951) and "Why Do Beginning Teachers Fail;" Ellis and Radebaugh (1971).

The study reported here is part of a larger investigation of professional role performance difficulties reported by first year Illinois public school teachers. The results of the study may be of use to those who are involved in the preparation of elementary teachers at the university level and to those school district personnel who conduct supervisory and staff development functions. These findings indicate areas in need of emphasis and/or revision in both preservice and inservice programs for the development of elementary school teachers.

Problem. What professional roles and activities do first year elementary teachers in Illinois public scho ls report that they have difficulty performing? Furthermore, how do these teachers rate and rank the professional difficulties that they report and do their rankings differ from rankings by teachers of other grade levels?

Procedures. The study adhered to the descriptive survey approach. A list of all first year teachers who were teaching in Illinois public schools (exclusive of the Chicago Public Schools) during the 1980-81 school

SP 021 500

year was obtained from the Illinois State Board of Education. This list consisted of 3,465 persons. A systematic sample of 1,571 was selected. Near the end of the school year each member of the sample was mailed the instrument of the study.

The instrument of the study was based on the concept of teacher role performance (Kinney, 1952) and a scale developed by Ellis and Radebaugh (1974). For purposes of the study, teacher difficulties were defined as those difficulties which teachers perceive themselves to have in the performance of their professional roles and activities at a level of success satisfactory to them.

In addition to providing written indications of difficulties experienced in performing activities unique to teaching in the elementary school, these teachers reported difficulties encountered in performing each of seven roles common to all public school teachers. These seven roles are briefly described as follows:

Role 1. The Teacher as Planner

Teachers identify and assess the needs and problems of both students and society. They identify, assess and state clearly defensible instructional objectives. They plan and develop appropriate learning materials and activities. They plan to assess and evaluate performance. They communicate and report the progress and needs of students. They plan for all of these activities to take place.

Role II. The Teacher as Director and Helper of Learning

Teachers work to help students learn. They plan, make decisions and take actions. They constantly and reflectively

evaluate each activity and occurrence. Their actions involve getting ready for learning, interacting with the students and assessing both students and society.

Role III. The Teacher as Counselor and Guide to the Student

Throughout the entire mediating or teaching process teachers also give behavioral evidence that they believe in the students' potential as persons. Teachers work with students who have unique needs and problems which include a personal, social, emotional, moral, physical and intellectual nature. Teachers demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of the individuality in his totality.

Role IV. The Teacher as Mediator and Interpreter of the Culture

Teachers and students belong to a specific culture which necessitates conscious awareness and critical examination. Teachers are responsible in a unique way to communicate clearly and reflectively the culture.

Role V. The Teacher as a Link with the Community

Teachers and students are a part of a cultural setting and both are involved with the culture through community needs, happenings, interpretations and customs. The very service and art of teaching necessarily link teachers to the community and the community to the teachers. Teachers help translate community values, needs and goals into school programs and communicate school programs to the community.

Role VI. The Teacher as a Member of Teaching Profession

As a member of the teaching profession, teachers advocate and practice professional autonomy including the freedom to teach and to learn. They accept responsibility for their professional judgements, acts and conduct. They continue their professional growth and contribute to the further development of the profession.

Role VII. The Teacher as a Member of the School Community

As a member of the school community teachers relate to and share experiences with students, administrators, supervisors, other teachers and support personnel. They share in the general duties and responsibilities of the school and participate in efforts to improve the quality of programs and life in the school.

Sample. Of the 614 returned questionnaires , 169 were received from first year elementary teachers in Illinois public schools. A summary of responses to this instrument appears in the narrative and tables which follows.

Of those who responded, 143 or 88.8% were female and 18 or 11.2% were male. Nearly 99% were assigned to teach in an area for which they were certified. They were employed mostly by school districts that served rural/small town (49.5%) and suburban (39.8%)communities while 9.6% were from urban schools. (It should be noted that a directory of first year teachers for the 1980-81 school year was not available for the Chicago Public Schools when the study was begun; thus, the population did not include teachers from that large urban school district.)

Findings. A sample of these first year teachers was requested to indicate the degree of difficulty they experienced performing four specific professional activities as these activities appeared unique to teaching at the elementary level. Respondents reported that they had the most difficulty with "providing for different student learning styles" and the most difficulty in "working in a mainstreamed situation." In only one of these four activities, were there more than 50% of the teachers reporting that they had difficulty performing the activity. (See Table I)

As they were completing their first year of teaching these elementary school teachers were asked to rate, in order and in terms of the degree of difficulty encountered, acitivites inherent in the performance of seven professional roles. Additionally, they were asked to provide an overall rating of the degree of difficulty that they had experienced with each role. (See Table II) Respondents were also encouraged to make relevant comments for each role.

An examination of the data presented in Table II indicates that in two of the seven roles more than 50% of those responding encountered difficulty. The roles reported to have given them the greatest difficulty was "the teacher as a link with the community" (59.3%) and "the teacher as a planner" (50.3%). The roles reported to have given the least difficulty were "the teacher as a member of the school community" (14.5%) and "the teacher as a member of the teaching profession" (16.9%).

A discussion of the difficulties encountered in performing specific activities associated with each of the seven roles follows.

For the role teacher as a planner, particular difficulties were reported for the activities involving "establishing relevant and clear objectives" and "planning for assessing and evaluating performance." In

both of these activities, over half of the first year teachers reported having difficulty. Several respondents provided written comments relating to their role as a planner. These comments concerned identifying and assessing the needs and problems of both students and society and developing appropriate learning materials and activities. The most frequent teacher comments pertained to difficulty with program planning, using unfamiliar texts, identifying the exact problems of the underachiever, and those students being mainstreamed. Comments regarding communicating to parents and knowing what was expected by the principal were the next most frequent followed by those concerning assigning grades and determining a student's grade level.

When considering the role teacher as director and helper of learning, nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they had the most difficulty using motivating activities. Respondents provided many comments about their role as director and helper of learning. These comments generally expressed difficulties with having time to plan, time to try new methods and techniques, time to work one-on-one, time for lesson planning, and time to find additional classroom material. New teachers were often critical of their peers who would give them little or no help in locating materials, games, and other activities or suggest discipline techniques for their classes. Several of the respondents' comments indicated problems with classroom management and discipline.

For the role teacher as counselor and guide to the student, the respondents reported their greatest difficulty to be "using evaluative techniques to gain awareness of students' needs." Several comments indicated that with budget cuts teachers and supporting staff were overworked and constrained in functioning in this role.

TABLE I

FIRST YEAR ILLINOIS PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' REPORTS OF DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED WHEN PERFORMING PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES UNIQUE TO THEIR LEVEL OF TEACHING

N=72*

Teaching Activities	Degree of Difficulty Reported							
	Little or None		Moderate		Considerable		Extreme	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Working in a "mainstreamed" situation.	43	67.2	19	29.7	1	1.6	1	1.6
Working with students in specific instructional groups.	40	60.6	24	36.4	2	3.0	0	0.0
Identifying student readiness for instruction.	33	50.0	30	45.5	3	4.5	0	0.0
Providing for different student learning styles.	19	30.2	31	54.0	10	15.9	0	0.0

*All respondents did not respond to all items.

TABLE II

FIRST YEAR ILLINOIS PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' RATINGS OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLE PERFORMANCE DIFFICULTIES

N=169*

Teacher Professional Roles	Role Performance Difficulty Rating							
	Little or None		Moderate		Considerable		Extreme	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher as planner.	83	49.7	78	46.7	5	3.0	1	0.6
The teacher as director and helper of learning.	98	59.4	65	39.4	1	0.6	1	0.6
The teacher as counselor and guide to student.	109	66.1	56	33.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
The teacher as a mediator and interpreter of the culture	89	54.9	66	40.7	7	4.3	0	0.0
The teacher as a link with the community.	66	40.7	77	47.5	16	[illegible]	3	1.9
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession.	138	83.1	24	14.5	4	2.4	0	0.0
The teacher as a member of the shcool community.	142	85.5	21	12.7	3	1.8	0	0.0

* All respondents did not respond to all items.

When considering the role teacher as mediator and interpreter of the culture, the respondents reported their greatest difficulty to be encouraging and facilitating students democratic involvement in school and community affairs. Respondents' comments related to this role expressed difficulty with understanding various cultural differences and identifying and interpreting values.

In performing the role teacher as a link with the community, a large number of respondents commented that they neither lived in or were involved in the community served by their school. However, a similar number indicated that they had an excellent working relationship with parents and others in the community. Teachers reported their greatest difficulty to be enriching student learning experiences through the use of community resources.

When considering the role teacher as a member of the teaching profession, the elementary school teachers reported little difficulty with any of the specific activities associated with this role. However, respondent written comments regarding this role indicated that it was hard to get involved in professional organizations when they did not know if their contract would be renewed or they would be able to secure another job. The demands of first year teaching were reported to constrain involvement in professional organizations.

When considering the role teacher as a member of the school community, respondents' reported little difficulty with any of the specific activities associated with this role. Those comments made by respondents regarding this role indicate difficulties due to failures of experiences teachers to assist them. Some first year teachers expressed the feeling that they were taken advantage of by being assigned the least desired extra duties and times.

After identifying and rating difficulties in their professional performance, the first year elementary school teachers were asked to rank in order of difficulty the seven professional roles that gave structure to this study. In Table III the results of their ranking appear with similar rankings provided by first year teachers from three other levels of school. Thus, the date in Table III allow a comparison to be made between and among four levels from which role performance difficulty rankings were obtained--pre-school-kindergarten, elementary, middle school-junior high and high school.

From an examination of these rankings it will be noted that the elementary teachers ranked the roles "mediators and interpreters of the culture" and "link with the community" as their first and second most difficult roles while the roles "members of a teaching profession" and "member of the school community" were ranked as their least and next to least difficult roles. When the ranking presented by the elementary teachers were compared with those of teachers at the other three teaching levels, a strikingly similar pattern prevailed regarding the two roles reported to be most difficult (mediator of the culture, and link with the community) and the two roles reported to be the least difficult (member of the profession, and member of the school community).

Summary and Conclusions

Three types of data were obtained from first year beginning elementary public school teachers in Illinois. Respondents provided information pertaining to four unique items expressly prepared for elementary teachers; data were provided regarding seven teaching roles and related activities for each role and finally a number of written comments were provided.

TABLE III

PROFESSIONAL ROLE PERFORMANCE DIFFICULTIES RANKED IN ORDER OF DIFFICULTY BY FIRST YEAR ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS SERVING AT FOUR LEVELS OF SCHOOL

Teachers' Professional Roles	Roles Ranked in Order of Difficulty By:				
	N=145 Pre School Kindergarten Teachers	N=169 Elementary School Teachers	N=145 Middle School Jr. High School Teachers	N=176 High School Teachers	N=614 All Teachers
	Grades P-K	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	
Teachers as planner	3	4	3	4	3
Teacher as director and helper of learning	6	5	4	3	5
Teacher as counselor and guide to the student	5	3	5	5	4
Teacher as mediator and interpretor of the culture	2	1	2	1	1
Teacher as a link with the community	1	2	1	2	2
Teacher as a member of the teaching profession	7	7	6	7	7
Teacher as a member of the school community	4	6	7	6	6

The two situations unique to elementary education teaching perceived as being most difficult were the tasks of identifying student readiness for instruction and providing for different learning styles. Some 70% of the respondents indicated moderate or considerable difficulty when attempting to provide for different learning styles. The unique task perceived as being the least difficult pertained to working in a "mainstreamed" situation.

The role data provided by respondents appears to suggest concern over most tasks related to "the teacher as planner". First year elementary teachers appear to be having difficulty establishing relevant and clear objectives, planning and developing appropriate content, learning materials and activities, planning for assessing and evaluating performance and planning for communicating the problems, progress and needs of students. These activities clearly appear to be those contained in most pre-service teacher education programs. If these data are indicative of needs of beginning teachers in Illinois, they behoove those in the business of preparing such teachers to carefully reevaluate curriculi and experiences directed at such critical teaching skills. Of particular interest is the consistent referral to difficulty with assessment and evaluation techniques that these first year elementary teachers reported across teaching roles. This appears as a problem area in the "the teacher as planner", "the teacher as director", and "helper of learning" and "the teacher as counselor" and "guide to student". Such findings lead to the conclusion that the test and measurement sequence at the pre-service level may well be deficit in meeting the needs of these neophyte teachers.

The second role that appeared as a potential source of difficulty with beginning teachers was Role V--"the teacher as a link with the

community". This particular role, so intimately linked with the educational foundation offerings at the pre- and in-service levels, was viewed by over 50% of the respondents as having either moderate, considerable or extreme difficulty. Of particular difficulty were three tasks. These were: encouraging critical thinking in dealing with community values, needs, goals and problems; participating with the public and others in developing educational goals and implementing programs to achieve goals; and enriching student learning experiences through the use of community resources. While it would appear appropriate to deal with broad process goals at the preservice level, perhaps the most viable means of dealing with the specifics of this concern is as an intergral part of a district's in-service and/or orientation program. Attention to such tasks could prove beneficial in building local understanding so imperative at this time of educational unrest.

Recommendations

The following four recommendations appear warranted:

1. Teacher preparatory institutions need to examine and reevaluate their curricula pertaining to tests, measurement and assessment.
2. Foundation offerings at the pre-service level should increasingly address the role of values, community goals and problems in shaping education.
3. Local school districts need to plan in-service and/or orientation sessions devoted to the needs and values of the local community and the possible impact of these needs and valued upon the local educational constituency.
4. The professional role performance approach used in this study should be considered in planning teacher preparation programs.

REFERENCES

Eddins, A.W., "Why Teachers Fail," Texas Outlook, 14: 16, 1930.

Ellis, J.R., "Relationships Between Aspects of Preparation and Measures of Performance of Secondary Teachers of the Social Studies." Journal of Educational Research, 55, Sept., 1961, pp. 24-28.

Ellis, J.R. and B.F. Radebaugh, "A Recommended Plan For A Follow-up Study of the Professional Performance of Graduates of the College of Education, Northern Illinois University and A Report of a Field Testing of That Plan," DeKalb: (Unpublished), Authors' Files. 1974, 107 p.

Kinney, L.B., "Measure of a Good Teacher," San Francisco: California Teachers Association Publication, 1952.

Morsh, J.E. and E.W. Wilder, "Identifying the Effective Instructor: A Review of Quantitative Studies, 1902-1952." San Antonio: Air Force Personnel and Training Research Center Publication, 1954.

Spears, Harold, "What Disturbs the Beginning Teacher?" School Review, 53: 458-463, 1945.

Wey, H.W., "Why Do Beginning Teachers Fail?" National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 35: 55-62, 1951.